

Native News

Newsletter of the Maryland Native Plant Society

September/October 2009

Volume 9 Number 5

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Upcoming Monthly Meetings

“Habitat Value of Natives: More Than Fashionable Flowers, Part II”

Tuesday, September 29, 7:30 pm
White Oak Library – Large Meeting Room

Continuing the theme of the 2007 Irvine Native Plant Seminar, 2008 Lahr Symposium, and June 2009 Howard County Master Gardeners presentation, this month's meeting will compare cultivars of native plants with native species and how these plants relate to the natural communities around us, including insights on the ongoing research into the secret life of plants and pollinators. Join us for a panel discussion with regionally and nationally recognized experts for a presentation on the choices planners, homeowners, and gardeners have in drawing from the region's natural floristic diversity and plant associations, with an aim towards conservation and restoration. Audience participation and questions will highlight the evening.

“A Year of Botanical Exploration in Maryland and Vicinity”

Tuesday, October 27, 7:30 pm
White Oak Library – Large Meeting Room

Join members of MNPS' Botany Committee for a presentation on the results of botanical surveys and field trips throughout the state and adjoining regions over the past year. The presentation will include newly discovered species and county records for Maryland by MNPS and Maryland DNR; recently scored national and state champion trees in Maryland; surveys in the southern Maryland counties of Charles, Prince George's, Calvert, and Anne Arundel; uncommon to rare species from Baltimore and Pennsylvania field trips; exploration along the upper C&O Canal; and recent natural community classification inventory work.

Directions: Exit the Washington Beltway at New Hampshire Ave (exit 28). Go north about 2 miles. The library is the first building on the right, once you have passed under Route 29, just after the Sears store.

Chris Frye and Wes Knapp measuring *Quercus shumardii* at Chapman Shell-Marl Ravine Forest.



Native News



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President's Letter

Dear Members,

Somewhere around the 25th of every other month, the phrase, “president’s letter,” appears on my to-do list. This is my fourth. The first three took some effort, but I had ideas I wanted to share, and so it was just a matter of organizing my thoughts. Today isn’t like that. It’s mid-summer. I feel sluggish. The plant species I’m most interested in right at this moment are members of the mint family (*Mentha piperita*, *Ocimum basilicum*), the melon family (*Cucurbita pepo*, *Cucumis sativus*), and the nightshade family (*Solanum lycopersicum*). None of them are native to Maryland.

Besides food and drink, here’s another topic that’s been on my mind: evolution. It occurred to me recently that I wasn’t really up to date on this important topic, so I took some books out of the library and started reading. Now I know a lot more than I did a few weeks ago about the evolution of animals, and to me, the most exciting discoveries pertain to the surprisingly close genetic relatedness of seemingly disparate species. Disappointingly, books on evolution for the non-scientist don’t have much to say about plants. But we know there’s a lot going on in the study of plant genetics and plant evolution. One way we know this is because of the flurry of activity in the taxonomy department. Melanie’s “Wildflower In Focus,” in this issue, describes how *Cimicifuga racemosa* (Black Cohosh) has recently been re-assigned to Linnaeus’s original classification, *Actaea racemosa*. This re-classification is based on genetic studies, but I imagine Linnaeus himself, looking down from a cloud, nodding and smiling. Proven right, once again.

Back to the dearth of botany in popular science, I’m reminded of a perceptive comment a friend recently made about landscape paintings. In those pictures, the overwhelming majority of living beings are plants. But let the artist put a tiny distant bird in the sky, or a cow in the clearing on the left, and that’s where our human eye focuses its attention. We notice our fellow animals. Plants fade into the background as merely the backdrop or the food for the animals — animals such as ourselves. Likewise, here I am in midsummer, paying a lot more attention to my tomatoes than to my Joe Pye weeds and my sunflowers.

So I’m ending by being grateful, once again, to the botanists and the plant societies for being different, for keeping their attention on the living beings that none of us fauna could live without, that nourish and sustain our animal world — the plants.

ONE MORE THING: You must go to the conference this year. We have two really outstanding speakers, Elizabeth Byers and Woody Bousquet. And who wouldn’t enjoy a field trip into Maryland’s Catoctin Mountains, or to nearby Sugarloaf? See you in September.

Kirsten Johnson

The Maryland Native Plant Society’s mission is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Maryland’s native plants and their habitats. We pursue our mission through education, research, advocacy, and service activities.

Native News

MNPS Announcements

Native News Would Love to Hear From You!

Have you had a memorable time on a MNPS field trip recently? Discovered a new book about native wildflowers? Enjoyed a woodland walk? The *Native News* would love to hear from you! We invite MNPS members to submit short articles and photographs to the *Native News* for publication. Essays about field trip experiences and book reviews are welcome! Please send your submissions to Melanie Choukas-Bradley at choukas@erols.com or 7100 Oakridge Ave, Chevy Chase, MD 20815 and put "Native News" in the subject heading of your email. Be sure to give us your name, phone number, and mailing address. Articles may need to be edited for space. We hope to hear from you!

Welcome New Members!

The following have recently joined the Society: Cecily Bedwell, Heather Burnham, Michael Koller, Ross Lillard, Nancy Miller, George and Sharon Orange, and JoEllen Youngblood (for the Chesapeake Garden Club). We thank everyone for their continuing support.

Not receiving our monthly emails?

Lately, member emails have been bounced back from the monthly email, especially Yahoo, Comcast, and Verizon accounts. Check your spam folders and make sure that mnps@chesapeake.net is in your address book or list of approved emails. You can also send an email to mnps@chesapeake.net to verify that we have your correct email address.

Do you know when your membership expires?

To tell when your membership expires, (and what type of membership you have) take a look at your mailing label. For example, if your label reads 9/1/2009 your membership expires at the end of September. If it's time to renew, please use the form on the back of this newsletter or download one from the website. Mail your dues to MNPS Membership, PO Box 4877, Silver Spring, MD 20914. If your label does not include a date (example E-54) you are receiving a newsletter as part of our exchange program with other native plant (and similar) societies. Memberships or donations to support this service are appreciated.

Native Plant Professionals

One of the Society's many services is providing a list, available on the website, of our current members who have told us that they are native plant professionals. This list is different than the list of nurseries found on the website, since it includes professional gardeners and landscapers as well as native plant propagators and suppliers. If you wish to receive a copy of this list, or if you wish to be included on the list, please contact Karyn Molines, kmolines@chesapeake.net or 410-286-2928.

Maryland Native Plant Society 2009 Annual Fall Conference September 26-27

The Catoctin Mountains: Maryland's Blue Ridge
*NEW LOCATION: Glade Valley Church of the Brethren,
Walkersville and Field Trips throughout the Region*

Registration Fee: (includes lunch): \$50 members; \$65 nonmembers

Saturday Social Fee: \$30 per person (includes dinner)

The Catoctin Mountains and surrounding region, including calcareous habitats, will be highlighted. The conference starts Saturday with speakers followed by afternoon and Sunday field trips. We are in the planning stages, but mark your calendar now. Speakers: Elizabeth Byers on "High Mountain Flora" and Woodward Bousquet on "Maryland's Blue Ridge Mountains in their Appalachian Context."

Field trips to: Catoctin Mountain, Gambrill State Park, Snyder's Landing, Cunningham Falls State Park, Catoctin National Park, and Sugar Loaf Mountain.

Poster Session and Handouts: Tables will be available for participants to place handouts and erect displays relevant to Maryland native plants and their habitats. Contact Carole Bergmann 301-253-6241, carolebergmann@hotmail.com for more information.

Photography Contest: Bring your best Maryland native plant photos to the conference for our third photography contest. Categories are Native Plants, Native Plant Pollinators, and Threatened Habitats. Winners will be chosen by conference participants who will vote for their favorite entries in various categories. There will be space to display your photographs during the conference and social. Details about the contest can be found on our website, www.mdflora.org.

Native Treasures Sale: Do you have unneeded botanical or nature-oriented items that may be someone else's Native Treasure? How about extra field guides or environmental books? Consider selling them at the first ever "Native Treasures" sale. The sales will benefit MNPS programs. Please provide the selling price for each item.

Scholarships are available. Contact Beth Johnson: 301-949-6338, bajohnsonjohnson@verizon.net. For other information, contact Karyn Molines, Conference Chair: 410-286-2928, kmolines@chesapeake.net. Register by September 10 to assist with catering estimates.

Please make checks payable to:
Maryland Native Plant Society

Mail to: MNPS Fall Conference
P. O. Box 4877

Silver Spring, MD 20914

(Please see registration form on next page.)

Book Review

Book Review: Rhoads, Ann Fowler, and Timothy A. Block, *The Plants of Pennsylvania, An Illustrated Manual*, 2nd Ed., Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, 1042 pp, \$69.95.

In June I heard author Timothy Block speak at the Native Plants in the Landscape Conference at Millersville, PA. His talk was subtitled, "What do you mean, no more asters?" I had thought the evidence was pretty strong that the so-called North American "asters" are not sufficiently related to the European asters to be classified in the same genus. I was eager to find out more.

Dr. Block reviewed the history of plant taxonomy, pointing out that plant names have been changing constantly since the days of Linnaeus. "Why do taxonomists change names? To reflect their best understanding of evolutionary relationships." Of course this understanding is incomplete. And reasonable minds can differ over what is the best evidence of common evolutionary ancestry. However, he believes that *The Plants of Pennsylvania* is currently the most advanced flora in the United States.

Dr. Block continued with a detailed explanation of the six genera in which the North American "asters" are now classified. Aha!! Finally a key to the aster reclassifications. And it looks like a very usable key. I had expected to keep the book on the shelf until fall composite season, but I'm enjoying it already. The keys that I've tried are well constructed, and it's artistically produced, with lovely illustrations and attractive typeface. *The Plants of Pennsylvania* it isn't a field manual. Not all species are illustrated, and at over 1000 pages, it's a big, heavy, hardcover. But it's a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone with an interest in plants in the Mid-Atlantic states.

I wish I had bought the book before Millersville. I would have asked Block about the reclassification of several genera that used to be in the Figwort Family (*Scrophulariaceae*). Where is *Penstemon* now? I wondered. Oh, there it is, reassigned to the Plantain Family (*Plantaginaceae*), "in accordance with recent molecular studies." I'd like to know more about that. I also enjoyed the little joke in the Violet key — how *V. sororia* comes at the very end!

Warning: this book contains a surprising number of errors. I found several right off the bat when I tested it on some weeds from my back alley. Send your corrections to Dr. Block for the third edition.

Kirsten Johnson

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2009 Conference Registration: Not a member? Join and register at member's rates.

Name (s) _____
Street _____
City _____
State _____ Zip Code _____ County _____
Home Phone _____
Work Phone _____
Email _____

Any Dietary Restrictions?	
Registration Fee	
Saturday Social	
Membership	
Additional Donation	
Total Enclosed	

Chapter Events and Updates

Greater Baltimore Area Chapter Meeting

Is It An Invading Alien?

Invasive Plant Identification and Control

Learn how to identify common invasive species and how to control them in your backyard. We will look at pictures and plant samples to learn to distinguish invasive plants from native plants. Control methods covered will include mechanical and chemical methods with an emphasis on safety and minimizing the effect of control methods on surrounding plants. Dr. Sylvan Kaufman has her Ph.D. in Ecology and currently does writing, consulting and teaching on ecology, conservation landscaping, and invasive plants. She is co-author with her father Wallace Kaufman of "Invasive Plants: guide to Identification and the impacts and control of Common North American Species."

The meeting will be at Irvine Nature Center, 11201 Garrison Forest Rd, Owings Mills, MD 21117 and will start at 7:00 pm. Copies of Dr. Kaufman's book will be available at the meeting.

Prince George's/Anne Arundel Chapter

Contact information is: Matt T. Salo, 5607 Greenleaf Rd, Cheverly, MD 20785; telephone 301-341-1261; email mtsalo1@excite.com or mtsalo1@gmail.com.

LOOKING FOR A FIELD TRIP? Check the MNPS website (mdflora.org) for field trips and chapter events that didn't make the *Native News* publication deadline.

<p>Photos on Page 5: Sugarcane Plumegrass by David M. Lawlor Diverse Tidal Marsh by Rod Simmons</p>
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Autumn Field Trips

Civil War Fort Sites in the Washington, D.C. Region (84th in Series) – Fort Dupont

Leaders: Mary Pat Rowan and Lou Aronica

Date: Sunday, September 6 **Time:** 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
We will return to FORT DUPONT.

Directions: We will meet in the parking lot of the Ft. Dupont Activity Center off Randall Circle. Randall Circle is on Minnesota Ave SE at Massachusetts Ave SE. Access via East Capital Street and go south on Minnesota Ave SE to Randall Circle which is at Mass Ave SE. Or, take I-295 from the beltway north to Pennsylvania Ave SE and turn north on Minnesota Ave. Travel north until you get to Mass Ave SE which is Randall Circle. Go around the circle and into the park at the sign and you will see the parking lot on your left.

Bring: Water and lunch. **Note:** Easy to moderate walk. A light drizzle is fine but cancelled if pouring rain.

Contact: Mary Pat Rowan blair-rowan@starpower.net or 202-526-8821.

Plant and Pollinator Photography, Blue Mash Nature Trail

Leader: Albert Hartley

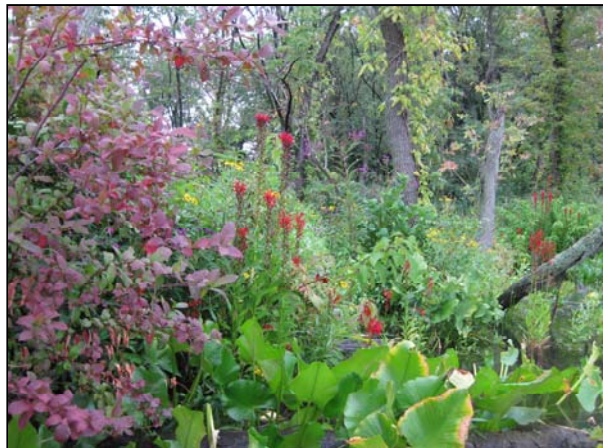
Date: Sunday, September 13 **Time:** 10:00 am

The meadows on this reclaimed land should be full of goldenrod in September. A mix of wooded and open habitats along the nature trail will provide many opportunities for photographing wildflowers and insects. This is a good spot for birding, too. This is a flat hike, though it can get muddy, and if it has been raining there may be a stream or two to ford.

Directions: From route 108 between Olney and Laytonsville, take Zion Road to the parking lot north of Brookville Road.

Bring: Camera, hat, water, appropriate shoes, field guides and binoculars.

Contact: Albert Hartley albert@sprucecm.com with the subject "MNPS field trip" or call 301-251-2253.



Family Field Trip to Rock Creek Park

Leader: Glenn Rice

Date: Saturday, September 26 **Time:** 10:00 am – 1:30 pm

To Be a Tree: Trees are terrific! Learn what it takes to be a tree and tree ID through activities, games, and a hike.

Directions: Rock Creek Regional Park, 5100 Meadows Lane, Rockville, MD. Program located at picnic shelter adjacent to the right side of the Nature Center.

Note: This program is geared for children ages 7 – 10 yrs old.

Contact: Glenn Rice grice88865@aol.com.

Columbus Day Weekend (Oct 10 – Oct 12) in Pennsylvania's Ridge & Valley Province

Leader: Lou Aronica

Date: Saturday, October 10 **Time:** 9:30 am – 4:00 pm

We will return to the Haldeman Tract of the Weiser State Forest to extend our investigation begun last spring. This is a locally higher elevation site, about 1700 ft., of Chestnut Oak-Heath forest. We should find some minniebush (*Menziesia pilosa*) whose northern range ends in mid-state Pennsylvania. In order not to give complicated directions, on Saturday we will meet in our usual location of Dauphin, Pennsylvania and group ride to the site. **On Sunday, October 11th and Monday, October 12th** those who gather on October 10th will be able to choose between one or more nearby sites. These include **Doc Smith Run Woods/Bear Puddles; Peters Mountain Wetland; Limestone Bluffs along Wiconisco Creek; Smoke Hole Run-Powell Creek Swamp; Rattling Creek Watershed; Oakdale Station Woods.**

Saturday Directions: Proceed to Harrisburg, PA via I-83 (Baltimore Area) or I-270 and Route 15 (DC area). Take Route 22-322 about 7 miles north to the town of Dauphin – exit into town about 1000 feet – and gather in front of small shopping area on left.

Bring: Lunch, water, and footwear for some rocky and occasionally wet terrain. **Note:** Local accommodations will be identified for anyone planning to stay overnight. For those who plan to participate only Sunday or Monday, contact Lou Aronica on the evening of the 10th to learn whatever decision has been made on the sites for these days.

Contact: If you are late or lost, call cell phone 703-597-3711.

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Crow's Nest, Stafford County, Virginia

Co-sponsored by the Botanical Society of Washington and the Mattawoman Watershed Society

Date: Saturday, October 17 **Time:** 10:00 am – 5:00 pm
It's been ten years since Hal Wiggins led a field trip for MNPS to the spectacular forests, wetlands, marshes, and wildlife of Crow's Nest – too long! Just this year, it's a pleasure to announce that much of the site – 2,900 acres – has been purchased by the state as Virginia's 54th Natural Area Preserve. Hal Wiggins will lead a field trip to the new Crow's Nest Natural Area Preserve. Find information about the preserve at:

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural_heritage/natural_area_preserves/crowsnest.shtml. This site is Virginia's largest and northernmost example of calcareous coastal forest and is quite similar in general composition to the exceptional calcareous forests on Southern Maryland's coastal plain, but with its own inimitable nuances. The trip will be an all day adventure. Hal Wiggins is a member of VNPS, an Environmental Scientist and naturalist, long-time advocate for Crow's Nest, and author of *Virginia Native Plants* and *A Field Guide to Crow's Nest*. This field trip is a rare opportunity to visit this special place with a guide who has explored it for many years and whose stalwart advocacy has resulted in its permanent preservation.

Directions: Participants will meet at the gate, just several miles east of Brooke (check the MNPS and BSW websites for complete details).

"...the preservation of Crow's Nest helps maintain the aquatic health of Potomac and Accokeek Creeks, where large beds of native submerged aquatic vegetation help maintain good water quality...The remaining stands of hardwood trees at Crow's Nest are some of the largest in Virginia. The biodiversity at Crow's Nest and the recreational opportunities for learning about Virginia's ecosystems is spectacular."

—Hal Wiggins, Environmental Scientist, US Army Corps of Engineers (letter to DEQ, October 14, 2004)

[Crow's Nest] contains "some of the rarest forest communities on earth," holding an "extremely unique assemblage of plant species"

—Tom Smith, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (*Free Lance-Star*, January 13, 2004)

Tree Anatomy Walk

Wheaton Regional Park, Silver Spring

Leader: Richard Murray, arborist and author of the *Tree Biology Notebook*

Date: Saturday, November 7 **Time:** 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
To understand trees, we need to study how they grow in a natural setting. Our walk will look at tree architecture (parts and structure), branching patterns, and contrast how trees adapt to environmental influences; i.e. woods, edge, and open settings. Aging stages (young, mature, declining), defect patterns, and how trees compensate for wounding will be explored. We will also look down into leaf layers for non-woody roots, including mycorrhizae.

Directions: From Georgia Ave or University Blvd, take Arcola Ave to Orebaugh Ave. Turn into Wheaton Regional

Park Athletic Complex and drive ½ mile to the parking lot at the Dog Park/Open Air Hockey Rink.

Bring: Light lunch, notepad, and hand lens. **Note:** Moderate to easy walk, rain or shine, limited to 20 participants. Registration is required.

Contact: Richard at richardmurray@shannontree.com. Richard will have books available for signing after the walk.

Native News Deadlines:

Sept 25 November/December Late Autumn/Holidays Issue

Nov 25 January/February Winter Issue

Jan 25 March/April Early Spring Issue

March 25 May/June Late Spring Issue

May 25 July/August Summer Issue

July 25 September/October Early Autumn Issue

Next Mailing Party Date (White Oak Library):

Tuesday, October 27 at 7:00 pm

Some Comments By James Duke On Seeds, Seedlings, Systems, and Systematics

[Excerpts reprinted from *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden, Volume 56, 1969*]

The importance of seeds to systematics is readily apparent in *Gray's Manual* (Fernald 1950) where the second major division is termed "Spermatophyta" meaning seed-plants, but there are cultivated spermatophytes which bear no seeds. Subdivisions also bear titles reflecting seed characters, Gymnospermae and Angiospermae, depending on whether the carpels are open or closed, but there are exceptional angiosperms which have open carpels (*Anchietea*, *Butomus*, *Decorsella*, *Firmiana*, *Mitrasacme*, *Moringa*, *Reseda*, *Trillium*) (Melville 1962). The classes, Dicotyledones and Monocotyledones, are based on the number of cotyledons but many dicots (especially in Caryophyllales and Ranales) have only one cotyledon normally developed. Some monocots, e.g., *Arisaema*, *Arum*, *Commelina*, *Dioscorea*, *Paris*, *Rajania*, *Sagittaria*, *Tamus*, *Tinantia*, *Trichopus*, and *Trillium*, regularly or aberrantly reveal traces of a second cotyledon. Some taxa are stenosperrmous with little seed variability, while others are euryspermous with much variability. Several *Asteraceae* and some *Rubiaceae* (with capitate inflorescences) have different types of seeds in the "ray" and "disc" flowers of the same capitulum. Species of *Stellaria* have capsules containing seeds with two types of sculpture, the percentages of each type being environmentally determined... Thus, seeds are important to systematics for the definitions of taxa, from the division to the subspecific categories.

Seeds, like other plant entities, defy rigid definition, but a common definition is "fertilized ovule." The angiosperm ovule consists of a central body, enclosed more or less completely by one or two integuments and supported on a

basal stalk, the *funicle*. The central body consists of the *nucellus*, a distal part, in which sporogenous tissue is borne, and the *chalaza*, a basal part where funicle, integuments, and nucellus merge. In sessile ovules, the funicle is absent, but in some the funicle may be elongate and adnate to the ovule body forming a ridge, the *raphe*.



Most botanists at several points in their career will have received seeds for identification with no other information than: “This seed is used by the natives (1) to poison fish, (2) to eat raw, (3) to make necklaces, (4) to poison animals, (5) as an anthelmintic, (6) as an oil source, (7) pulverized as an insecticide, (8) as a starch source, (9) as a candle, etc.” Or the letter may read, “The enclosed seed was found: (1) germinating in sea drift, (2) among the belongings of a jazz musician, (3) to constitute 90% of the tufted titmouse’s food intake, (4) clinging to the clothing of an exile Cuban, (5) in a Navajo campsite, (6) mixed in with pollen 1000 feet above New York City, (7) to cause dermatitis among three prisoners, (8) in the ejecta of a regurgitating child, (9) as a frequent fossil in a Pleistocene deposit, etc.” Unsolicited letters arrive by the hundreds in botanical gardens all over the world with statements like the above followed by the question “What is it?” Responsible taxonomists faced with such queries have spent days combing the literature to find out which seeds are barbasco, poisonous, edible, common in sea drift, airborne, allergenic, ornamental, etc. It is sad that most of their hand-scribbled notes could not be transcribed to an information retrieval system available to subsequent botanists. Knowledge of the origin of the seed can be equally useful if entered into the system. There are many genera with brilliant red seeds, but how many occur in your backyard, in your state, in your country, in your continent, in your hemisphere?

General Announcements

Ongoing Moss Study Group

We're a mix of beginners and advanced beginners, and we take our time looking closely at a moss or two each meeting. Led by Charlie and Linda Davis and sponsored by the Natural History Society of Maryland, we meet from 10:00 am until noon on the last Saturday of the month (September 26, October 31). **Location:** Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum, 300 Oella Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21128 **For a map:** <http://tinyurl.com/6h6dvh> **Bring:** Any moss books, hand lenses, and microscopes that you can. If you have a local specimen you'd like the class to look at, bring that, too. **Contact:** Linda lm.davis@verizon.net or 410-252-4154.

Olmsted Woods Walks and Bird Walks

Washington National Cathedral

Massachusetts & Wisconsin Ave, Washington, DC 20016

Woods Walk ~ Thursday, November 5 at 10:00 am ~

BRILLIANT FALL COLOR WITH NATIVE PLANTS

This walk will feature native plants such as: American Serviceberry, American Yellowwood, Virginia Sweetspire, Spicebush, Fragrant Sumac, and native ferns and grasses. Come stroll with staff horticulturist Maureen Alonso through the All Hallows Guild Amphitheater and the Olmsted Woods and admire the brilliant borders of native plants that surround the edges at this colorful time of year. Plants' ornamental value, folklore, and landscape uses will be discussed.

Bird Walks ~ Thursdays, September 17 and 24 at 8:30 am

In the restored Woods a guiding principle is the inclusion of groundcovers, shrubs, and trees for birds and other wildlife. Bring your binoculars and catch the spring migration with experienced birder Sheila Cochran.

For the tours: Participants meet at the George Washington Statue on Pilgrim Road, which is on the south side of the Cathedral. Visitor parking is available in the Cathedral garage accessible off Wisconsin Ave. No reservations are required and all programs are free. Programs will be cancelled in the event of heavy rain. Woodlands Information Line: 202-537-2319. Please wear sturdy waterproof shoes.

Are you interested in learning more about sustainable landscape design? Would you like to learn more new research in urban ecology and meet others with similar interests? **Join the Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council at its “Turning a New Leaf” conference on December 4, 2009.** The conference will feature tracks on sustainable landscape design, green business models, working with local government, and urban ecology. An eco-marketplace, continuing education credits and a post-conference wine and cheese networking event complete the offerings. Registration (\$95 before Nov 1 and \$105 thereafter) is available in mid-September at <http://www.chesapeakelandscaping.org/2009leaf.htm>. Join us! For additional information call 443-482-2156.

~ Wildflower in Focus ~

Black Cohosh

Cimicifuga racemosa (L.) Nutt.

Actaea racemosa L.

Buttercup Family (Ranunculaceae)

Written by
Melanie Choukas-Bradley

Illustration by
Tina Thieme Brown



Field studies teachers and field trip leaders often urge students and participants to learn the scientific, as well as the common names, of native plants, reasoning that scientific plant species names are universally known and accepted while common names vary from place to place and person to person. Scientific names also convey information about the plant's relationship to other species and genera. However—as with many things botanical—scientific plant names aren't as fixed and certain as many of us would like. Black cohosh is a good case in point. While those of us confused about this plant's many common names have taken refuge in the universally accepted and alliterative *Cimicifuga racemosa*, we are now being asked to accept a scientific name change. Wikipedia makes a pretty good stab at describing the current situation: "The species has a history of taxonomic uncertainty dating back to Carl Linnaeus who, after some earlier revisions, had eventually placed it into the genus, *Actaea*, based on morphological characteristics of the inflorescence and seeds. This designation was later revised by Thomas Nuttall, reclassifying the species to the genus, *Cimicifuga*, based solely on the dry follicles produced by black cohosh that are typical of species in *Cimicifuga*.[1] However, recent additional data from morphological and gene phylogeny analyses demonstrate that black cohosh is more closely related to species of the genus *Actaea* than to other *Cimicifuga* species, prompting the revision to *Actaea racemosa* as originally proposed by Linnaeus.[1]" (The work cited in Wikipedia is: Compton JA, Culham A, Jury SL (1998). "Reclassification of *Actaea* to include *Cimicifuga* and *Souliea* (Ranunculaceae): Phylogeny inferred from morphology, nrDNA ITS, and epDNA trnL-F sequence variation". *Taxon* 47: 593-634. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1223580>.)

Reverting to an older name has been the reason for many nomenclature changes in the past. However, with so much genetic research in the works, resulting in taxonomic reclassifications, name changes are coming at us at an accelerated pace, dating the guides we use in the field. Some of us take a conservative approach to name changes. Others are more flexible. In MNPS President Kirsten Johnson's words: "The older I get the more excuses I find to dislike new things. But plant names aren't just names, they're repositories of interesting information about the relationships among species, and the botanists who studied them. So it's fun to follow the reasoning behind the changes." I agree with Kirsten, but I am not wholly ready to let go of *Cimicifuga racemosa*, a favorite name of a beloved native wildflower. To help with the transition, I remind myself about the "rose by any other name..." My motto is to try to learn the new name (sometimes grudgingly), but remember the old one, and to keep in mind that taxonomy and nomenclature are always evolving. As this article goes to press, I receive a note about the name change from Patricia S. De Angelis, Ph.D. Botanist - Division of Scientific Authority Chair - Plant Conservation Alliance - Medicinal Plant Working Group, US Fish & Wildlife Service: "there is incomplete agreement as to the genus transfer, especially in medicinal plant circles, where *Actaea* is well-known as a poisonous genus."

Stay tuned! And remember that your knowledge and experience of the plant itself need not waiver in the face of taxonomic reclassification or changes in nomenclature. The USDA plant database website lists scientific name synonyms. If the name you know isn't listed first, hopefully you'll still be able to find it on the website.

Native News

~ Wildflower in Focus ~

Black Cohosh

Continued

Flowers: Small, creamy white, in long narrow terminal clusters (racemes). Buds are round. When they open, the outer floral parts soon fall off leaving many white stamens that give the flowers a fuzzy look. Stamens are less than ½" long. Each plant stalk bears one to several 3 - 20" long flower clusters. **Leaves:** Alternate, compound and very large. Often growing in a pattern of threes. Three large leaflets are divided into smaller subleaflets which are toothed and ovate, or sometimes lobed. Leaflets and subleaflets vary in size. **Height and Growth Habit:** 3 - 8'; tall, narrow flower clusters extend upwards from the leaves. **Habitat and Range:** Woodlands (often on rocky slopes), roadsides; Massachusetts to Indiana, south to South Carolina and Missouri. According to plant ecologist and MNPS board member Rod Simmons: "*Cimicifuga racemosa* [or *Actaea racemosa*] is an important and dominant plant of the Appalachians, commonly seen in abundance on rocky slopes and coves of mixed oak and mesophytic forests. It is well distributed but much less abundant in the piedmont and along the fall line, again usually occurring most prominently on wooded slopes, ravines, steambanks, and mesic woodland. In Maryland, it is generally rare to absent on the coastal plain, except locally on rich, loamy, calcareous marine sands and marl deposits of 'Shell-Marl Ravine Forests.' Maryland's largest and finest example of this type is an old-age section of the north tract of Chapman Forest along the Potomac River in western Charles County. I just completed a vegetation sampling plot for the National Vegetation Classification/Maryland DNR at this site which comprised a steep north-facing slope above a seepage stream valley. Colonies of *Cimicifuga racemosa* grow here amidst ancient groves of *Staphylea trifolia* and a suite of other disjunct montane and inner piedmont flora such as *Carex albursina*, *Quercus muehlenbergii*, *Fraxinus americana*, and others. A small section of similar forest with *Cimicifuga racemosa* and other disjunct flora also occurs in rich, forested ravines along the Chesapeake Bay at Flag Ponds Park in Calvert County." **Herbal Lore:** Black cohosh root has been used to treat many conditions, including bronchitis, rheumatism, snakebite, menstrual problems, childbirth, and menopause. Steven Foster and James Duke report in Peterson's Eastern/Central Medicinal Plants: "Research has confirmed estrogenic, hypoglycemic, sedative, and anti-inflammatory activity. Root extract strengthens female reproductive organs in rats." Alonso Abugattas, Arlington County naturalist and director of the Long Branch Nature Center, has some fascinating herbal facts to impart to MNPS members about this plant: "First I thought the genus name had been changed to *Actaea*? It has a ton of common names which point to the many uses and beliefs people had for it: black cohosh, bugbane (the less-than-pleasant flowers were crushed along the skin to repel pests and *Cimicifuga* supposedly means 'to chase bugs away'), black snakeroot, fairy candles (for the dainty flowers), richweed, bugwort, squawroot, rattletop (the seed heads rattle), papoose root, rattleweed, and rattlebox. The Cherokee (and some Iroquois) used the roots for rheumatism and to help babies sleep more soundly. Many used it to treat snakebites. James Duke mentions (although with caution) that it can be used for these also. The main pollinators are supposedly carrion flies (again the flowers smell less than nice). Jack Sander's wildflower book has some neat tidbits about it, the most interesting of which was a reference to a patented medicine called Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound that was used for menstrual pains and boasted cohosh as a main ingredient. Sanders points out though that since it was 20% alcohol...it was popular for use by 'polite women' and during Prohibition. He says that it is still available but without the booze. I like the distinctive 3-pronged look this plant has." **Warning: Black cohosh should not be harvested in the wild. Montgomery County Forest Ecologist and MNPS board member Carole Bergmann points out that this plant's local populations have been decimated by deer and by plant collectors. Similar Species:** According to MNPS board member, field studies teacher and author Cris Fleming, black cohosh "can be confused with doll's eyes (*Actaea pachypoda*) if only the leaves are present. Not so much so in our [Washington, D.C.] area since doll's eyes isn't found here often, but in mountain areas where they both grow together. We had good examples of both next to each other on the MNPS joint trip with Pennsylvania NPS." **Blooming Time:** June - August. **Locations:** Throughout Maryland (but not common on the Coastal Plain): Little Bennett Regional Park; Black Hills Regional Park; Rachel Carson Conservation Park; Hoyles Mill Conservation Park; Sugarloaf Mountain along the Red Trail near the summit; Catocin and South Mountains; South River Greenway, Anne Arundel County; and Shepherd Parkway in the Fort Circle Parks, Washington, D.C.

MNPS board members Carole Bergmann, Cris Fleming, Kirsten Johnson, Karyn Molines, and Rod Simmons contributed to this article as did Alonso Abugattas, Patricia S. De Angelis, Charles Smith, and others. Article adapted from *An Illustrated Guide to Eastern Woodland Wildflowers and Trees: 350 Plants Observed at Sugarloaf Mountain, Maryland* (Choukas-Bradley and Brown, University of Virginia Press, 2008).



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